

## Naval War College Review

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Volume 29  
Number 4 *Autumn*

Article 6

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1976

# The Role of the Kiev in Soviet Naval Operations

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### Recommended Citation

Hynes, William R. (1976) "The Role of the Kiev in Soviet Naval Operations," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 29 : No. 4 , Article 6.  
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*Recent discussions of the roles and missions of the Soviet Navy have been marked by wide differences of opinion. Briefly, one of the two main schools of thought maintains that the Soviet Navy has been built as a reaction to Western naval dominance and as a reaction to the deployment of strategic weapons in submarines. The other school of thought ascribes the more traditional Mahanian concepts to the Soviet Navy. Lieutenant Commander Hynes avoids the extremes of both schools in his discussion of the capabilities and possible missions of the Kiev, the new Soviet "ASW cruiser," which has a capability of embarking fixed wing V/STOL aircraft as well as helicopters. The political tasks Kiev could perform may well prove to be more important than her operational capabilities.*

# THE ROLE OF THE KIEV IN SOVIET NAVAL OPERATIONS

by

Lieutenant Commander William R. Hynes, U.S. Navy

The report in 1971 of a Soviet "aircraft carrier" under construction at Nikolayev was not totally unexpected, despite Soviet rhetoric condemning Western carriers as highly vulnerable, expensive platforms. Stalin recognized the value of aircraft carriers and apparently had approved construction of an unspecified number, although none were built. Khrushchev had been instrumental in the development of the naval air arm and the submarine force, and it was clear to the Soviets that carriers had been important to the Allies during World War II in gaining control of the sea.

The development of Kiev must be considered within the overall context of how the Soviets see the Western naval threat facing them. Such an approach may imply a defensive role for Kiev, but

in the final analysis, the primary mission of the Soviet Navy is to protect the homeland from attack from the oceans. Following an extensive debate in the early 1960's, the fleet has been forward deployed as a means to counter the West's seaborne strategic weapon delivery capability. According to Michael McGwire, the Soviet naval objective in wartime would be to limit the damage caused by sea-launched strikes and, as a deterrent measure, to deny the West the option of withholding SSBN's from the initial exchange. Specifically, maritime defense zones have been extended into the potential operating areas of the SSBN, and through active peacetime presence the Soviets seek to establish a deterrent force that could, in wartime, deny use of the strategic sea areas to the West, particularly the United States.<sup>1</sup>

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The increasing capability of U.S. submarine-launched strategic missile systems undoubtedly caused the Soviets to reevaluate their strategic defensive posture. The Polaris A-1 system deployed in 1960 was limited in range to approximately 1,200 miles. The A-3 system that became operational in 1964 more than doubled the threat range, and the development of the Poseidon system with its MIRV warheads added a new dimension to the problem. Clearly, if the Soviets were to be able to counter this threat they needed to develop ASW platforms capable of operating at great distances from the Soviet homeland. The Soviet Navy's text for higher naval schools states that the "principal task confronting the Soviet Navy is that of combating these forces."<sup>2</sup>

Admiral Gorshkov has emphasized the importance of building task-specific ships, i.e., ships designed to accomplish a particular mission. Some countries, Gorshkov says, have tried to economize by building a single class of surface ship that can do everything, but have not been successful.<sup>3</sup> However, in December 1974 Gorshkov apparently took a different stand when he stated that

... the sharp increase in naval offensive and defensive capabilities is being achieved not only and not so much by an increase in the number of ships and other weapon platforms as by expanding the range of missions which each platform is able to prosecute through its more advanced weaponry. In other words, clearly it is not the quantity but the quality of the weapons platforms, i.e., the total power of the potential combat capabilities concentrated on them, which is becoming the final criterion of the scope of operations.<sup>4</sup>

As platform capabilities increase, there can be a corresponding increase in assigned tasks. Although there is no reference to aircraft carriers implicit in

Gorshkov's remarks, his views provide a vantage point from which to observe Kiev and her capabilities.

**Kiev's Design Characteristics.** The Soviets probably decided as early as 1963 or 1964 to develop "ASW cruisers" capable of carrying large numbers of helicopters. The development of the V/STOL aircraft, especially Freehand, suggests that they may have been included in their early plans for shipborne aviation. The subsequent testing of V/STOL aircraft aboard *Moskva* offers conclusive evidence of their long-range plans.

*Moskva* and *Leningrad* apparently served as operational test beds for the evaluation of airborne ASW systems and tactics. When the *Moskva* program was terminated, the Soviets obviously had a follow-on ship in the planning stage; that ship was *Kiev*, the first of the *Kuril* class. The final details were probably held in abeyance pending the test and evaluation of the *Moskva* units and the development of a suitable V/STOL aircraft.<sup>5</sup> The Soviets have experimented with a number of V/STOL aircraft types. In addition to the Freehand, variants of the Fishbed and Flagon series and the Faithless have all demonstrated a vertical lift capability.

*Kiev*, at 35-40,000 tons, is the largest warship ever built in the Soviet Union. Like her predecessor *Moskva*, she is classified by the Soviets as an ASW cruiser. The greatest similarities between these two ships appear to be in the weapons and electronics systems. Both carry the SA-N-3 (Goblet) for air defense, a surface-to-underwater missile launcher, ASW rocket launchers, and 57mm guns. Additionally, *Kiev* will carry the SA-N-4 missile system for point defense.<sup>6</sup> The principal electronics appear to be the same. Both ships carry the Top Sail and Head Light radars.<sup>7</sup>

Forward, both ships give the appearance of cruiser hulls; but the

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similarities end there. *Kiev's* displacement is approximately twice that of *Moskva*. She has a 550-600 foot angled flight deck that extends almost two-thirds of her overall length (925 feet). *Moskva's* flight deck is only 295 feet long and is located aft of her superstructure. While both ships can easily accommodate the Hormone ASW helicopter, only *Kiev* is designed to permit operation of a significant number of V/STOL aircraft.<sup>8</sup>

Because of the absence of catapults and arresting gear on *Kiev*, her fixed wing aircraft operations would necessarily be limited to V/STOL type aircraft. These aircraft could be used for a variety of missions, including reconnaissance, strike, or air defense. In the absence of superior U.S. aircraft carriers, Soviet V/STOL aircraft could be employed in a limited sea control role and conceivably could conduct air strikes against shore installations or troop concentrations. However, unless and until the Soviets have achieved a major breakthrough in design technology, the payload and performance limitations inherent in V/STOL aircraft would severely limit their mission capabilities.

The evidence indicates that a follow-on to the *Freehand* has been developed. Since 1967, trials of what is apparently an improved version of the *Freehand* have been conducted at Ramenskoye airfield near Moscow. This aircraft is the same type as the one tested aboard *Moskva*.<sup>9</sup>

**Kiev's Most Likely Missions.** In "Navies in War and Peace," Admiral Gorshkov describes the primary missions of the Soviet Navy.<sup>10</sup>

Under today's conditions the basic mission of navies of the great powers in a world-wide nuclear war is their participation in the attacks of the country's strategic nuclear forces, the blunting of the nuclear attacks by the

enemy navy from the direction of the oceans, and participation in the operations conducted by ground forces in the continental theaters of military operations. In this instance, navies will perform a large number of complex and major missions.

Important missions in protecting the interests of the Soviet state and the countries of the Socialist community confront the Navy in peacetime too.

The primary wartime missions of the Soviet fleet, then, may be characterized as:<sup>11</sup>

- strategic offense—nuclear powered submarines armed with ballistic missiles;
- strategic defense—denial of the use of the sea to Western SSBN's and attack carriers;
- support of ground operations—securing the flanks of the Warsaw Pact nations against invasion from the sea (control of local seas), interdiction of enemy sea lines of communication, i.e., the disruption of enemy supply lines as a means of indirect support of the land battle, and projection of power ashore through amphibious operations.

In peacetime, the primary role of the Soviet Navy is strategic deterrence. This mission is carried out by Soviet SSBN's on patrol within striking distance of the United States and by the presence of the Soviet Fleet in strategically important areas such as the Mediterranean and the Norwegian Seas.

The protection of Soviet interests overseas is becoming an increasingly important mission. Does the Soviet Union plan to develop a capability for worldwide support of so-called wars of national liberation? The Gorshkov series, while it expresses a clear appreciation for the importance of naval power as an instrument of foreign policy, gives no clear indication as to what Soviet intentions might be with regard to a global capability.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the

Soviet naval presence off the coast of Guinea (since 1970) and more recently during the Angolan civil war provide examples of Soviet intentions toward Africa.

In the context of Admiral Gorshkov's mission statement outlined in "Navies in War and Peace" and proceeding from the premise that Soviet naval strategy is largely reactive to the strategic threat posed by the West, it is possible to postulate a number of possible missions for Kiev.

### • Antisubmarine Warfare

With the deployment of U.S. SSBN's commencing in 1960, the Soviets decided to concentrate on the development of ASW ships as well as submarines. The value of sea-based ASW helicopters was recognized at that time, and with the development of the *Moskva*, the Soviets had their first "helicopter cruiser." *Moskva* and *Leninograd* were ostensibly developed as test platforms for Kiev. But Kiev is a radical departure primarily because of her size and angled flight deck. According to Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, USN (Ret.), she can carry 25 V/STOL or 36 helicopters, with a mixture of the two considered most likely.<sup>13</sup> *Moskva*, however, is limited to the operation of about 18 Hormone helicopters and has only a very limited V/STOL capability.

Kiev is almost certainly a follow-on to the *Moskva* class. Her capability to deploy with organic fixed-wing aircraft indicates that the Soviets are preparing to counter the long-range Poseidon C-3 and Trident missile systems with a surface ASW platform that can operate at great distances from the U.S.S.R. and, if necessary, beyond the range of shore-based air cover. Gorshkov has emphasized the fact that the range of American SLBM's more than doubled between 1964 and 1974, and he has indicated a keen awareness of the Trident threat which, he says, will again double the

threat range and expand the front of operations accordingly.<sup>14</sup>

Another aspect of strategic ASW operations concerns the use of Kiev in a pro-SSBN role, i.e., to protect Soviet SSBN's from attack by Western ASW forces, principally submarines. A 1971 *Morskoi Sbornik* article by Capt. First Rank D.P. Sokha stated that the primary mission of U.S. nuclear attack submarines was "combatting other submarines and protecting their own guided missile submarines."<sup>15</sup> The following year Capt. First Rank N. Aleshkin wrote that Western SSN's were intended "to track and destroy nuclear powered guided missile submarines and attack submarines."<sup>16</sup>

Senior Soviet spokesmen evidently have not publicly addressed the broad question of the total U.S. ASW mission during wartime, although writings at the "technical level" have indicated general awareness of U.S. efforts in the field of ASW. From these sources we know that the Soviets at least recognize that the U.S. ASW capability can be targeted against their SSBN's.<sup>17</sup>

In his final chapter of "Navies in War and Peace," Admiral Gorshkov emphasized the importance of supporting submarine operations with surface ships and aircraft. He stated that:

... a modern navy, whose mission is to conduct combat operations against a strong enemy, cannot be only an undersea navy. The underestimation of the need to support submarine operations with aircraft and surface ships cost the German high command dearly in the last two wars. ... one of the reasons for the failure of the "unlimited submarine war" prosecuted by the Germans was the absence of such support for the submarines, which forced them to operate without the support of other forces.<sup>18</sup>

Given the importance that the Soviets assign to their SSBN's as a deterrent force, it seems reasonable to

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assume that SSBN protection is a major consideration in the development of the *Kuril* class carrier, particularly in view of the historical Soviet concern with defensive missions for their navy. Bradford Dismukes argues that the SSBN is the greatest high-value unit in the Soviet Navy and that its importance is likely to increase as long as mutually assured destruction remains the basic theme of United States-Soviet strategic arms negotiations.<sup>19</sup>

### • Sea Control

The Soviet view of sea control differs from that of the United States.<sup>20</sup> While sea control is essential to the maintenance of U.S. overseas alliances, geography and politics have removed this necessity from the U.S.S.R.. Nevertheless, the Soviets do have economic/political interests in overseas nations and are expanding the scope of their naval operations considerably. From a strategic point of view, the Soviets, in wartime, would attempt to deny the West the use of sea areas that could be used to project power ashore. This, of course, means that the Soviets would concentrate their efforts against Western attack carriers and SSBN's. They would also attempt to exercise control of their sea frontiers to protect the flanks of the army. In this regard, the Soviet concept of sea control would be similar to that of the United States: the Soviets would attempt to gain and maintain control of local seas such as the Baltic, the Barents, and the Sea of Japan by asserting their own use of the seas and by attempting to deny use to the enemy.

The most likely utilization of *Kiev* in a sea control role would be to provide protective air cover for Soviet surface combatants operating beyond the range of shore-based naval aircraft. The Soviets recognize that they are not assured of the use of overseas bases in periods of tension or in time of war. The loss of their submarine base in

Albania in 1961 and their airbase rights in Egypt in 1972 cannot be ignored by their planners, and they have only to look at the U.S. experience in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic for further evidence of the unreliability of foreign bases. Admiral Sergeev, the Chief of Naval Staff, has commented that his greatest problem in the forward deployment of the Soviet fleet was "bases."<sup>21</sup> This requirement for bases is founded on the need for logistics and repair facilities and the need for air cover to protect surface units.

The Soviets' concern over the threat of air attack at sea is evidenced by the wide variety of air defense systems built into their ships. The deployment of standoff air-to-surface missile systems such as Harpoon and Condor will further complicate their air defense problem. Although *Kiev*, with a complement of approximately 25 V/STOL aircraft, would be no match against a large deck U.S. CV, she could provide a measure of protection for Soviet surface forces operating in a relatively low threat environment. Development of a shipborne aircraft air defense capability could provide the Soviets with an alternative to overseas bases.

### • Projection of Power Ashore

In a general war against NATO the Soviets would probably use their amphibious forces to protect the seaward flanks of their army. The control of vital chokepoints, such as the Danish and Turkish Straits, would be important. The Soviet naval infantry is small (15,000 men) but, when viewed in conjunction with their airborne assault capability, the Soviet projection forces pose a formidable threat to NATO.

The Soviets have given no indication that they consider their projection capability inadequate or that they consider airborne assault from the sea necessary to support the land battle. Their intentions toward development of an over-

the-beach airborne assault capability in the Third World are less clear. Soviet amphibious units have deployed regularly to the Mediterranean and, to a lesser extent, the Indian Ocean. Although the Soviets have used their navy to create an image as the protector of client states overseas, there has been a noticeable lack of deployed forces that could support these countries with an over-the-beach assault by troops launched from an amphibious carrier.<sup>22</sup>

According to one observer, the Soviets have apparently opted for a different strategy, especially in those countries where they have strong politico-economic interests. In these countries the Soviets apparently plan to develop a strong foothold in peacetime so that, in the event of hostilities, a beachhead will already have been established. In a situation such as this, the Navy would attempt to control the sea frontier of a Third World country, perhaps in much the same way it would defend the shores of the U.S.S.R.<sup>23</sup> This strategy, however, would require a strong Soviet position in the host country, and its success would depend upon the reactions of the West. Should the United States decide to intervene, the Soviets would require forward-based logistics support and shore-based air cover to counter the carrier threat.

The operations conducted by *Moskva* and *Leningrad* have given no indications that the Soviets plan to utilize their helicopter carriers in an amphibious assault role. The *Hormone* is primarily an ASW helicopter and although it could be used to carry troops, this seems unlikely because of its relatively small capacity. The larger Soviet troop carrying helicopter (*Hip*) and assault helicopter (*Hind*) could be deployed aboard *Kiev*; but due to their size and the restrictions imposed by the inboard location of *Kiev's* aircraft elevators, these helicopters could not be moved below the flight deck.

The possibility remains, however,

that *Kuril* class carriers with V/STOL aircraft embarked could be employed in a strike role. Admiral Gorshkov has indicated that advances in weapons technology have permitted an expansion in the range of missions which each ship is able to perform.<sup>24</sup>

#### ● Peacetime Presence

In his 1972/1973 series "Navies in War and Peace," Admiral Gorshkov points to the

special features of the Navy as a military factor which can be used also in peacetime for purposes of demonstrating the economic and military power of states beyond their borders . . . it has been the solitary branch of armed forces capable of protecting the interests of a country beyond its borders . . .<sup>25</sup>

Gorshkov has indicated that a navy, more than any other branch of the armed forces, is an indicator of the level of development of a country's economy. He quotes Engels as saying that, "A modern warship is not merely a product of major industry, but at the same time is a sample of it . . ."<sup>26</sup> Further, Gorshkov has shown a keen awareness of the role of navies in show of force operations. He has written that

. . . the capability of navies to suddenly appear close to the shores of different countries and immediately proceed to carry out their assigned missions has been used for ages by various aggressive states as an important weapon of diplomacy and policy in peacetime, which in many cases has permitted the achievement of political gains without resorting to military operations by merely threatening to initiate them.<sup>27</sup>

With the forward deployment of the Soviet Navy there has been a marked increase in foreign port calls. Gorshkov has indicated that from 1971 to 1974 some 1,000 Soviet combatants and

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auxiliaries visited ports in 60 countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. He stated that these visits have made it possible for the people of many countries to see with their own eyes the "creativity of the ideas of Communism" and to gain an appreciation for the level of development of the U.S.S.R.<sup>28</sup>

MccGwire has divided the peacetime role of the Soviet Navy into three tasks: securing state interests, increasing prestige and influence, and countering "imperialist aggression."<sup>29</sup> MccGwire defines securing of state interests as the building up, consolidating, and preserving the infrastructure on which war related missions depend. This includes actions such as the overthrow of a client state and the acquisition of base rights. Thus the berthing of Soviet units in Port Said and Alexandria in July 1967 not only provided a deterrent against Israeli strikes but, more importantly from the Soviet view, insured Soviet access to Egyptian port facilities.

Increasing prestige and influence implies the use of naval power as an instrument of foreign policy. Showing the flag, port clearing operations in Bangladesh, and intervention in the Iraq-Kuwait border disputes are examples.

Countering "imperialist aggression" entails the use of Soviet naval forces to contest the West's use of the sea for projection of military power. Two illustrative examples are the counter-presence of Soviet naval forces in the eastern Mediterranean during the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973 and the Jordanian crisis of 1970.

There are several political tasks that Kiev can perform in furtherance of the Soviet "presence" mission. The deployment of embarked fixed wing aircraft will demonstrate the power of the U.S.S.R. for purposes of prestige and influence; it will increase the Soviet capability to influence potential adversaries with Soviet power, intimidate them, lower their morale, and help to

secure political objectives without actually fighting.<sup>30</sup> Deployment of a number of *Kuril* class ships will add to the loss of American naval credibility, especially in those ocean areas where U.S. capabilities are already marginal, such as the Norwegian Sea, the Northwest Pacific, and the Indian Ocean. And, perhaps most important, *Kiev* will help the U.S.S.R. in its quest to deny the United States unimpeded use of the oceans for the projection of naval power, particularly the projection of strategic nuclear power. In this role *Kiev* and her sister ships are probably viewed by the Soviets as important elements of strategic deterrence.

**Conclusions.** Although a variety of missions for *Kiev* are possible because of the capability to embark fixed wing V/STOL aircraft as well as helicopters, the strategic defense role during wartime appears to be of the utmost importance to the Soviets. In peacetime, the political effect *Kiev* could produce relative to Western nations and Third World countries remains an important consideration.

Although *Kiev* has the capability to deploy both fixed wing and helicopter aircraft, her size would tend to argue against her effectiveness in a multi-mission combat role. The fact that she is a hybrid design—part cruiser and part carrier—will limit both aircraft operating and maintenance spaces. Further, the inboard location of her aircraft elevators will further reduce space and will restrict aircraft operations somewhat unless the elevators are in the up position. While the deployment of large numbers of both V/STOL aircraft and helicopters would require diverse logistic and technical support, the effect of a multimission combat role would be a reduction in primary mission effectiveness. Therefore, in a general war the aircraft mix would more than likely be tailored to accomplish a strategic ASW mission, either in countering enemy



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SSBN's or in support of Soviet SSBN's. A number of V/STOL aircraft could be embarked to oppose enemy surface ASW platforms and patrol aircraft, thereby providing an additional measure of protection for Soviet SSBN's and self-protection in hostile forward areas where shore-based air cover is not available. However, in all probability ASW operations would primarily be directed against the Poseidon SLBM threat and the eventual deployment of Trident in the 1980's.

During "show of force operations," Kiev could be deployed as an effective instrument of Soviet foreign policy, particularly in support of Moscow's political and economic interests in the Third World. The appearance of Kiev off the coast of a client state would undoubtedly have more influence than a destroyer or cruiser with little or no capability to provide direct support to friendly forces ashore.

The best evidence, of course, is lacking. We will undoubtedly learn much

more about the Kuril class when Kiev enters the Mediterranean for the first time and provides Western observers an opportunity to witness her operations first hand. Until that time, the best indications are to be found in Soviet writings.

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### BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



A graduate of the University of Miami, Lt. Comdr. William R. Hynes is a graduate of the Defense Intelligence School. He has served on the staff of Commander, Carrier Division 2, and at Headquarters, U.S.

European Command. He is a 1976 graduate of the College of Naval Command and Staff, Naval War College. Currently he is assigned to the staff of Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet.

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### NOTES

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3. Peter Vigor, "Admiral S.G. Gorshkov's Views on Seapower," *RUSI, Journal of the Royal United Services Institute for Defense Studies*, March 1974, p. 59.

4. Gorshkov, p. 56.

5. McGwire, p. 514.

6. John E. Moore, ed., *Jane's Fighting Ships, 1975-1976* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1975), pp. 551-552.

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11. See Vice Adm. Stansfield Turner's commentary on the final chapter of "Navies in War and Peace," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, November 1974, p. 68.

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13. John W.R. Taylor, *Jane's All the World's Aircraft, 1975-1976* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1975), p. 523.

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16. N. Aleshkin, quoted by Dismukes, p. 576. (Note: The term "guided missile submarines" as used by Sokha and Aleshkin is assumed to mean "SSBN's.")
17. Dismukes, p. 576.
18. Gorshkov, "Navies in War and Peace," p. 62.
19. Dismukes, p. 577.
20. See Turner, p. 68, for a comparison of United States and Soviet naval missions.
21. MccGwire, p. 533.
22. John Funkhouser, "Soviet Carrier Strategy," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, December 1973, p. 36.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Gorshkov, "Development of Art of Naval Warfare," p. 56.
25. Sergei Gorshkov, "Navies in War and Peace," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, January 1974, p. 21.
26. F. Engels, quoted in Sergei Gorshkov, "Navies in War and Peace," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, October 1974, p. 58.
27. Gorshkov, "Navies in War and Peace," October 1974, p. 59.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
29. MccGwire, p. 528.
30. See Franklyn Griffiths, "The Tactical Uses of Naval Arms Control," *Soviet Naval Policy, Objectives and Constraints*, p. 643, for a discussion of a number of peacetime political tasks identified by Gorshkov in his series "Navies in War and Peace."

